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ABSTRACT

Educational Growth Groups are highly structured groups which place heavy emphasis on personal responsibility, interpersonal communication skills, and empathic understanding. Facilitators reach students by using a variety of media forms to discuss topics not commonly covered in the classroom. The EGG has the potential of offering preventive counseling to large numbers of people. In each group, previously held values and beliefs are challenged, new information is presented, and participants plan ways of using their fresh awareness and knowledge. EGG's fill the gap between what is learned in the classroom and on the streets. For counselors, EGG's help them expand their impact in a university/school by working with students who probably would not come for personal counseling. In this presentation, a brief review of the literature provides the background for the development of Educational Growth Groups, and the simple, step-by-step model for preparing, promoting, and conducting Educational Growth Groups is presented. (Author)

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Hatching the EGG:

A Model for Educational Growth Groups

James E. Cerio

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Running head: Hatching the EGG

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Abstract

Hatching the EGG: A Model

for Educational Growth Groups

Educational Growth Groups are rooted in the early guidance groups of 1907. Their eclectic development incorporates the facilitative conditions of Rogers, the three phases of Carkhuff, the values clarification techniques of Morrison & Price and others, and the knowledge and creativity of facilitators. They are highly structured groups which place heavy emphasis on personal responsibility, interpersonal communication skills, and empathic understanding. Facilitators "reach" students by using a variety of media forms to discuss topics not commonly covered in the classroom.

The EGG has the potential of offering preventive counseling to large numbers of people. In each group, previously held values and beliefs are challenged, new information is presented, and participants plan ways of using their fresh awareness and knowledge. EGG's "fill the gap" between what is learned in the classroom and on the streets. For counselors, EGGs help them expand their impact in a university/school by working with students who probably would not come for personal counseling.

In this presentation, a brief review of the literature will provide the background for the development of Educational Growth Groups, and the simple, step-by-step model for preparing, promoting, and conducting Educational Growth Groups will be presented.

"Educational Growth Groups" is a term which we have given to a structured group experience that works.

Today, we will tell you about it's background; we will explain the model and its rationale; we will make ourselves available to talk in detail about the educational growth groups which we have conducted; and we will give you an opportunity to work in small groups and consider uses of the EGG in your job setting.

I'd like to introduce our panel. Jay Cerio is the Coordinator of Co-Curricular Programs at the State University of New York Aggricultural and Technical College in Canton, New York. He has conducted an EGG on the topic "Interpersonal Conflict Resolution". Michael Cooper is the Director of Housing at the same college. His EGG, which has been designed and will be conducted in April, is on "Interpersonal Communication". Bill Dennett is the Director of Residence and Placement at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. Bill has conducted two group programs using the EGG model, entitled "Career Choices for Musicians" and "How Musicians Can Deal with Performance Anxiety". Nan Cerio, the Coordinator of Housing at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, has joined me during the past two years to conduct a group on Marriage and Alternate Lifestyles at Clarkson College in Potsdam, New York. It is from that group experience that the model for educational growth groups emerged (Cerio & Cerio, 1978). My name is Jim Cerio, and I'm the Assistant Director of the Student Development Center at Clarkson College. All of our presenters today are trained counselors.

Our introductory comments will be short so that a maximum amount of time will be spent in discussion groups and describing the programs which we have conducted using the model.

Nan will now talk about the background of educational growth groups.

Historical Perspective

In George Gazda's book, Group Counseling: A Developmental Approach (1971), the "group guidance" courses started at the turn of the century are described as "instructional groups... devoid, for the most part, of systematic use of group dynamics principles and techniques." E.C. Glanz and R.W. Hayes, in their book Groups in Guidance (1967) describe the 1930's as a period in which these guidance groups flourished, but dealt mostly with vocational topics. In the '40's, Kurt Lewin introduced group dynamics to the guidance group. At about the same time, Richard Allen in Providence, Rhode Island developed case conference procedures which allowed students to discuss problems or experiences which were common to most members of the group (Jones, 1963).

As we all know, there is a difference between group guidance and group counseling. Gazda (1971) makes the distinction as follows: group guidance is prevention-oriented, group counseling is both prevention- and remediation-oriented. Merle Ohlsen (1970) describes group guidance participants as having a common goal, such as obtaining specific information. Group counseling participants do not share a common goal, but instead discuss their own private concerns and find their own solutions. The educational growth group seems to fall somewhere in between.

Though the EGG model has yet to be applied in a high school setting, its uses in college settings have been encouraging. The students who have taken part in these groups have not always been the same people who have come to us for personal counseling. Often times, they are students with

questions, seeking answers from themselves and assistance from a caring group. They tend not to be students who see their questions as problems, and often times they feel that to discuss their concerns with a counselor would unnecessarily be tying up the counselor's time. The EGG, consequently, has filled the gap. It provides counselors with a vehicle for reaching these students in a manner which is not threatening. At a time when these students are asking meaningful questions for their own lives and looking for strategies to help deal with these questions, the educational growth group intervenes. The students may be developing coping methods, future plans, or simply more questions to be answered someday, but they are doing this at a time in their lives when no debilitating problems exist. They are becoming their own change agents, and they are doing this with the support, thoughts, and challenges of the other members of the group.

Perhaps of equal importance to all of you is that the EGG model has been structured in such a way as to make it easy for counselors to plan and impliment the group around different kinds of topics. It does not have to be time consuming. It does not have to be expensive. It <u>does</u> publicize the counseling center as a place where students can go even when they don't feel they have serious problems. It is a superb outreach tool and it helps to increase the numbers of students upon which counselors can make an impact.

Jim will now describe the model.

<u>The Educational Growth Group model</u>

When you entered the room, you received a handout which outlines the model. Please refer to that now.

One of the first things which you might notice is that the educational growth group is similar to many other groups in the literature. Our innovation, we believe, is that we have designed a model which offers a step-by-step method of conducting a five session (or five segment) group around almost any theme (excepting, of course, themes which require the learning of highly technical information). In reality, this model incorporates the best parts of teaching with the best parts of group work. It offers an effective structure for covering topics not typically discussed in the classroom.

Let's examine each step in the model.

Step 1: Breaking the Ice

The purposes of the first step are to help the students feel comfortable in this new group of strangers; to introduce the material and topic in as non-threatening a way as possible; and to begin a discussion focusing on personal values, giving each participant a chance to "meet" the other group members.

We have found that the use of a film which will provide "food for thought" is a great tool for Step 1. It is an easy way for a group to begin. The members can be entertained, they can "check each other out", they can get a sample of the kinds of issues to be discussed, and they get a subtle introduction to the kind of structure to expect throughout the group meetings. The counselor must constantly be working to establish a facilitative, trusting climate.

Step 2: Clarifying Values

A couple of values clarification exercises worked-through in dyads and then discussed with the entire group is an effective way of learning more about personal feelings on the topic. The counselor's role is to

point out the similarities and differences among the feelings and thoughts of the group members. Group members also begin to learn how to communicate with each other without threatening or hostilely challenging.

There is a greater degree of risk in this step than in the previous one, but the values clarification exercises are carefully designed so as to keep the self-disclosure risk at a comfortable level.

Step 3: Acquiring Information

By this point, the counselor is becoming aware of the areas within the topic where the students need more information. If it seems appropriate for the counselor to lecture in order to convey the information, this is the time when it makes the most sense. For one obvious reason, the students have spent the first two sessions learning about why this topic is important to them; they now have a reason to learn this material.

We have used books, tapes, and magazine articles to pass along information. Students are encouraged to share with the group exerpts from their readings which had meaning for them. They become teachers themselves, and yet at the same time are explaining themselves and their feelings to the group.

Step 4: Learning from Experience

By this point the group has learned how to effectively communicate with each other, partly by learning how to listen, and partly by modeling the counselor. They have also been learning more about the topic and about the feelings of the other members. This becomes an ideal point to introduce "outsiders" -- people who have strong feelings or direct experiences in this subject area and who can easily describe their feelings and experiences.

There is a very warm, caring atmosphere in this session. Confidentiality is stressed. It is apparent that the people are working to understand each other and to allow each person to have views which might be very different from their own. In almost every way, this can be the most powerful session. It is strategically placed near the end of the group experience, and it is a valuable introduction to the final session.

Step 5: Planning Future Strategies

The group has had a chance to ask questions, to learn some new material, to get to the root of their own feelings, and to hear about the feelings and experiences of others. They have worked hard to make meaning for themselves out of the group interaction. Now what will they do with all of this?

We spend the fifth session tying loose ends together. We process their reactions to the session with invited guests. We may ask them to complete a self-study survey, which would give them a chance to examine themselves on paper and learn if their understanding of themselves or of the topic has increased. We ask each person to plan what s/he will do with this newly gained knowledge. Questions such as, "Will you read more about this topic?", "Will you continue to meet together to explore this topic more?", "Will you try to interest your friends in considering this issue?", "Do you now have more concerns which you would like to personally explore, either with a counselor or on your own?" are asked of the students.

As the fifth session draws to a close, we ask the group to evaluate the whole program verbally and by using a short questionnaire. We try to learn what was most valuable to them, what was least valuable, what

needs to be changed or improved, and what other types of programs they want the Center to conduct. All of this information is used in future planning.

Closing Remarks

The importance of maintaining a facilitative climate throughout the educational growth group cannot be stressed enough. What we are offering is a structure which has given us some successful results in our group work. We know, however, that basic group protocol is still the key to helping people understand themselves and others. We refer you to the works of Carkhuff (1967), Gazda (1971), Ohlsen (1970), Rogers (1957, 1977), Coulson (1972), and others for steps in establishing the facilitative climate necessary for growth.

We also suggest that you examine the structured group models and values clarification techniques of Pfeiffer and Jones (1974), Seldman and Hermes (1975), Simon, Howe, and Kirschenbaum (1972), and Morrison and Price (1974). You are sure to find some valuable suggestions in these works.

Another suggestion involves work which you can do before you begin an educational growth group. We have found that brief meetings prior to session one with each person who signed-up for the group helps in screening participants. You will have a chance to explain your expectations to the participants, and they will be given an opportunity to become informed consumers. By having these prospective group members ask themselves, "Is this group really what I am looking for?", the responsibility for screening is laid upon the whole group. Subtly, an atmosphere of trust is already being built.

The use of different types of media in order to reach most of the cognitive styles of the group participants is strongly recommended. In our educational growth groups, we used a combination of films, books, recordings, and lectures for this purpose.

Finally, I want to thank four counselors who are not on our panel but whose ideas were helpful when this model was crystallizing: Joel Bixby from SUNY ATC at Canton, Jane Hart from Clarkson College, and Fritz Renick and Hugh Gunnison from St. Lawrence University.

The remainder of our program will be in two segments. In the first segment, we will offer you four resource groups so that you can get information on the EGG's which we have conducted on our campuses. After fifteen minutes, we will reconvene and divide into discussion groups so that you can begin to plan a use for the EGG model in your work setting. Those of you who do not wish to take part in this second segment may choose to leave once the resource groups are concluded.

Resource Groups

I'd now like to tell you what information you can acquire from each resource group.

Jay Cerio will offer information on conducting an EGG on the topic of Interpersonal Conflict Resolution. When Jay used this model, he varied the amount of time spent with each step in order to focus on the third step, Acquiring Information. He also made some modifications in the fourth step. Jay will be located ...

Bill Dennett's use of the EGG model has involved music students, yet the information can be generalized for use with other students concerned

with career choices or with anxieties. One of Bill's EGG's was shorter than the other, but both followed the model. Bill will be located ...

Mike Cooper has designed a group on Interpersonal Communication. His group will be conducted in five sessions. Mike will be able to discuss his design with you, and he will be located ...

Nan and I will give you information on our Marriage and Alternate Lifestyles group. We have conducted this twice, using five equally-lengthed sessions. I will also be available to discuss the EGG model with you. We will be located ...

Each of us has prepared a handout for your convenience, and we have included our addresses on the sheets. In case your questions are not answered here today, please feel free to contact us.

PLEASE GO NOW TO THE RESOURCE GROUPS THAT INTEREST YOU.

(15 minutes elapse.)

PLEASE RECONVENE FOR THE DISCUSSION GROUPS. IF YOU WOULD RATHER NOT TAKE PART IN THIS BRAINSTORMING EXERCISE, PLEASE LEAVE NOW.

Discussion Groups

In a few moments, we would like you to divide into five equally-sized groups so that you will have a chance to discuss the educational growth group model and how you can use it. A "brainstorming" technique will be employed so that you will generate ideas for topics and begin to plan your components for each step in the model. One of us will be in each of the

five discussion groups to guide you through this process. After approximately thirty minutes, we will be available in this room to answer your questions.

Our goal today is to encourage you to use the EGG model. Perhaps next year we can all gather once again at the APGA convention to share our experiences with the EGG model and continue its development.

NOW DIVIDE INTO FIVE GROUPS FOR THE DISCUSSION.

(30 minutes elapse.)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION. We will now be available for your questions.

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A MODEL FOR EDUCATIONAL GROWTH GROUPS

James E. Cerio
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I. Breaking the Ice

Films, video tapes, or audio tapes to introduce the topic of the group. Non-threatening introduction of each person, some discussion of films. Desired outcome: Group members begin to feel comfortable with each other.

II. Clarifying Values

Games or self-assessment tools done in dyads to learn more about self and others. Group reassembles to share dyadic experiences. Desired outcome: Group learns why this information is important for them.

III. Acquiring Information

Discussing a book, magazine, or tape which everyone in the group has read or heard. Instructor/Facilitator may lecture at this point. Gaps in knowledge of group about the topic will show here. Desired outcome: Group learns more about this topic.

IV. Learning from Experience

People who have experience, knowledge, or strong feelings about the topic are invited to talk to the group and answer their questions. Desired outcome: Group is challenged by the thoughts of others regarding the real-life implications of this topic.

V. Planning Future Strategies

How will each group member use their newly gained knowledge and awareness of this topic? What does each still want to learn about it? How will each person do it? Will the group interact in the future? How? The E.G.G. is evaluated by the group, and their suggestions for improvements are built into the next group. Desired outcome: Group members establish personal objectives and prepare for post-group interactions with others.

THROUGHOUT THE GROUP MEETINGS, THE "CLIMATE" IS CRITICAL.

Remember to use your skills in

EMPATHIC UNDERSTANDING
UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD
GENUINENESS
SPECIFICITY OF EXPRESSION
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